

Professionalism and Growth in Teachers

Julie Bancarz, Principal, Mamawi Atosketan Native School, Ponoka, AB

In Ellen White's book, *Education*, she describes true education as "the harmonious development of the physical, the mental and the spiritual powers" (p.13). Most of us accept, as studies have shown, that physical activity is important. And, as Christian teachers, we are convinced that spiritual development is important, feeling our need to continuously grow in our relationship with Christ. But the third element, growing mentally through professional development, though encouraged by a higher authority, is seldom accepted with enthusiasm by educators.



One of the important questions that administrators have to ask is how to motivate their staff to maintain, and continue fostering, a standard of professionalism. Over the last twenty years, in an attempt to improve North American educational standards, there has been an ever increasing emphasis on professional accountability (Hopkins, 2005). Relying on a variety of extrinsic factors to motivate employees, institutions have typically used "bonuses, fringe benefits, release time, increase in salary, and overload pay" (Hopkins, 2005, p. 5). While these factors may improve job satisfaction in the short term, many question whether they really improve the quality of education that an employee is motivated to deliver. What is needed is a series of intrinsic motivators that is encouraged by administrators. In 2004, Coyne conducted an interview with Sue Schafer, PhD. Schafer stated that to be truly motivated, one must have an inner desire to perform. This desire can be planted and nurtured by the encouragement and interaction of those in the same environment (Coyne, 2004).

"The true teacher can impart to his pupils few gifts so valuable as the gift of his own companionship" (White, 1903, p. 212). While this comment was intended to describe the relationship between a classroom teacher and his students, it can also be applied to the relationship between administrators and employees. As administrators, we want to be a valuable addition to our colleagues' development. The following are several ideas for motivating staff to continue their professional development.

Before an administrator can effectively motivate her/his staff, s/he must see to know what they need and want in their current roles. This knowledge can be attained through questioning and active listening. When choosing a professional development area, administrators must be sure that it is a topic of interest to his/her staff. S/He should ask questions that would direct the presenter to topics that would be of greatest interest (Anderson, 2003). S/He should allow staff members to ask questions and encourage as much active participation as possible. The more participation, the more involved the staff become. More is learned, and the staff have less time to focus on off-task activities.

Relevance is another effective motivator. Very few people have interest in topics that are of little use to them; therefore, leaders can motivate their staffs by allowing them to help with creating goals for the institution. When individuals work together in creating group goals, a community begins to form. Having a strong teacher professional community is a prerequisite for developing an effective school community (Hausman, and Goldring, 2001). In doing this, goals

become personalized and relevant. When things are relevant, people take interest. This is the first step in making information relevant and workable, as over time, staff will join together to accomplish their goals.

Individuals will work harder when they are in their comfort zone and have sure knowledge of what needs to be done to accomplish an outcome. It is difficult for anyone to succeed in either their personal or professional lives without sacrifice and disappointment. Success is not usually a one-shot deal (Lauer, 2005). A leader, therefore, needs to draw on the individual strengths of the workers so that there is more success than failure. When corrective knowledge accompanies failure, it is easier to point out where the situation went wrong and to rectify it.

Attitude is everything in an institution. It is not always easy for leaders to spot negativity and, therefore, encouragement should be given to staff to lift each other up using their own individual strengths and talents. Staff can use their enthusiasm, positive attitudes and passion to overcome any obstacle in their way. But in order to do this, they must be a team (Lauer, 2005).

A leadership position requires you to take care of individual, environmental, and group needs. When done correctly, an atmosphere of unity should exist. When individuals feel a sense of pride in where they work, they are motivated to improve themselves, those around them, and the environment in which they coexist (Coyne, 2004).

Recognition is considered to be one of the highest ranked methods of motivation. “There are so many opportunities presented to us in our life times and too many of us pull back because we think we may fail . . . Miracles happen every day, but the amazing thing is that those who try the hardest often wind up getting those so-called lucky breaks” (Lauer, 2005, p. 24). When individuals get those so-called lucky breaks, administration and colleagues need to recognize the efforts and determination in others to succeed in order to encourage them with continual self improvement. It is important, however, to remember that when recognizing an individual, one needs to be specific. Not only in the end result, but in how they reached that result (Coyne, 2004).

Ellen White indicates that in an educator’s field of work, there will be many trials. Teachers will find that their best efforts are not often appreciated, and they may become discouraged. She goes on to say that teachers “work together with God in promoting and carrying forward the work which Christ, by His own example, has taught them to do” (White, 1903, p. 42). They must become the light that will guide others to Christ. We must strive to better ourselves intellectually, both academically and spiritually, in the name of Christ. Hebrews 13:5 says, “I will never leave thee nor forsake thee” (King James Version). As educators, no matter how defeated we feel, we must remember that God is always there to push us forward to reach our highest potential for the sake of His children (White, 1968).

References:

- Anderson, Mary Alice. (2003). Jump-starting staff development. *School Library Journal*. 49(8), p. 36-38.
- The Bible, King James Version.
- Coyne, Claire. (2004). Motivational factors for PT's and PTA's. *Magazine of Physical Therapy*. p.46-51.
- Hausman, C.S., & Goldring, E.B. (2001) Sustaining teacher commitment: The role of professional communities. *Peabody Journal of Education*. 36(2).
- Hopkins, Grace A. (2005). Faculty motivation: A view from the ivory tower. *Academic Leader*. p.4-5.
- Lauer, Charles S. (2005). Being alive. *Modern Healthcare*. 35(1). p. 24
- White, Ellen G. (1968). *Counsels on Education*. Nampa, Idaho. Pacific Press Publishing Association.
- White, Ellen G. (1903). *Education*. Mountain View, CA. Pacific Press Publishing Association.